

in supporting this historic bill for our veterans today and for the generations of veterans to come.

I yield the floor.

#### VOTE ON WAGNER NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Wagner nomination?

Mr. TESTER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY), and the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 76, nays 21, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 214 Ex.]

#### YEAS—76

Baldwin	Heinrich	Rosen
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Blumenthal	Hirono	Sanders
Blunt	Hoeben	Sasse
Booker	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Boozman	Inhofe	Schumer
Brown	Kaine	Scott (SC)
Burr	Kelly	Shaheen
Cantwell	Kennedy	Shelby
Capito	King	Sinema
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Lujan	Tester
Cassidy	Manchin	Thune
Collins	Markey	Tillis
Coons	McConnell	Tuberville
Cornyn	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Moran	Warner
Cramer	Murkowski	Warnock
Duckworth	Murray	Warren
Durbin	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Fischer	Padilla	Wicker
Gillibrand	Peters	Wyden
Graham	Portman	Young
Grassley	Reed	
Hassan	Romney	

#### NAYS—21

Barrasso	Ernst	Marshall
Blackburn	Hagerty	Paul
Braun	Hawley	Risch
Cotton	Johnson	Rubio
Crapo	Lankford	Scott (FL)
Cruz	Lee	Sullivan
Daines	Lummis	Toomey

#### NOT VOTING—3

Feinstein	Merkley	Murphy
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the mo-

tion to proceed to Calendar No. 388, H.R. 3967, a bill to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

Charles E. Schumer, Jon Tester, Benjamin L. Cardin, John W. Hickenlooper, Richard Blumenthal, Jack Reed, Bernard Sanders, Brian Schatz, Tim Kaine, Richard J. Durbin, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Martin Heinrich, Margaret Wood Hassan, Tammy Duckworth, Kyrsten Sinema, Patrick J. Leahy, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Christopher A. Coons.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 3967, a bill to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) and the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 86, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 215 Ex.]

#### YEAS—86

Baldwin	Graham	Peters
Barrasso	Grassley	Portman
Bennet	Hagerty	Reed
Blackburn	Hassan	Risch
Blumenthal	Hawley	Rosen
Blunt	Heinrich	Rounds
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rubio
Boozman	Hirono	Sanders
Braun	Hoeben	Sasse
Brown	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Cantwell	Inhofe	Schumer
Capito	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Cardin	Kaine	Scott (SC)
Carper	Kelly	Shaheen
Casey	King	Shelby
Collins	Klobuchar	Sinema
Coons	Leahy	Smith
Cornyn	Lujan	Stabenow
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Tester
Cotton	Markey	Thune
Cramer	Marshall	Tuberville
Crapo	McConnell	Van Hollen
Cruz	Menendez	Warner
Daines	Moran	Warnock
Duckworth	Murkowski	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murray	Wicker
Fischer	Ossoff	Wyden
Gillibrand	Padilla	

#### NAYS—12

Burr	Lee	Sullivan
Cassidy	Lummis	Tillis
Kennedy	Paul	Toomey
Lankford	Romney	Young

#### NOT VOTING—2

Feinstein	Merkley
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The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SINEMA). On this vote, the yeas are 86, the nays are 12.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS ACT OF 2021—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Cloture having been invoked, the Senate will resume legislative session, and the clerk will report the motion to proceed.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to H.R. 3967, a bill to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

#### RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:17 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. SINEMA).

#### HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS ACT OF 2021—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

H.R. 3967

Mr. KELLY. Madam President, it is past due for us to address veterans not getting the care they need after suffering an illness caused by toxic exposure. We can do that as soon as this week by passing the PACT Act.

As a retired naval aviator, I know firsthand the sacrifice and hard work it takes to succeed in our military. I knew I wanted to join the military from a young age, and after attending the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, making that choice was easy for me. That is the case for some but not for everyone. Many more will say that this was the hardest decision that they had to make, putting families, school, careers, or all three through major changes in order to serve.

This is a sacrifice for so many, and regardless of how someone comes to serving, what follows isn't easy. We spend years training to go to war. For me, that was training to fly off of and land on an aircraft carrier and put bombs on enemy targets. That is what I did during Operation Desert Storm, flying combat missions off the USS *Midway* in the gulf, to deliver weapons on dozens of targets in Iraq and Kuwait.

War is by its very nature dangerous, and flying airplanes in combat or conducting ground combat operations is very complex. You need to focus on completing the mission while also focusing on your safety and that of your team or your crew. There are many opportunities to be killed or injured. We all get that. The public understands

that. But there are also silent killers that affected soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who served abroad.

No American soldier goes overseas and expects to be put in grave danger by their own military, but they were. We saw it in Vietnam with Agent Orange. We saw it in the first gulf war with toxic exposures that we are still grappling to fully understand. It happened again starting about 20 years ago when American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan were breathing in toxic smoke from American-made burn pits. Clouds of smoke containing plastics, rubber, medical waste, and chemicals billowed, and although the “stink” might have been a nuisance, the true physiological damage would turn out to be much worse.

We sent young, healthy, and highly capable American troops—all of whom volunteered—overseas. When they came home, they got sick, and then they got sicker, just like in the case of SFC Heath Robinson, whose namesake and story are behind the PACT Act.

Our servicemembers had put everything on the line, only to return with severe illnesses due to bad decisions. When those same servicemembers battling rare diseases filed claims with the VA, they were met with a closed door. They were told that it wasn't a service-connected illness, so it wasn't covered. This is shameful, and it is unacceptable. That is why this legislation is so important. Our military made mistakes, and thousands of Americans and more than 6,500 Arizonans have paid or are continuing to pay the price.

We must—we must—live up to our solemn obligation to look after our veterans, and that is what the PACT Act will do. This bill will lower the threshold for veterans to receive benefits, expand access to VA healthcare, strengthen the VA's ability to process claims, create pathways for future presumptions based on developing medical research, and much more.

So, together, let's get this bill across the finish line for our veterans and their families. They deserve better from Washington.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I want to reiterate and underscore and expand on some of the comments made by Senator KELLY from Arizona in support of this legislation.

We know that, as he said, our servicemembers put their lives and health on the line to keep us safe. Even those who come home can face long-term health risks from their service. Too often, we have not provided veterans the care and the benefits they have earned and deserve, particularly those exposed to toxic substances while serving in uniform. We have the opportunity this week, finally, to change that.

This week in the Senate, we are on the verge of passing the most comprehensive expansion of benefits for veterans who faced toxic exposure, in

our Nation's history. Providing healthcare and benefits for veterans who suffer from toxic exposure is a cost of going to war. We are willing to spend a lot of money going to war, as we need to, but we have never, never really stepped up taking care of our veterans—those who return home—because it is also costly, but it is what we need to do.

If you were exposed—fundamentally this—if you were exposed to toxins while serving our country, you deserve the benefits you earned, period, no exceptions. The Senate is finally on the verge of recognizing that.

My office holds roundtables with veterans all over Ohio, and I have heard veterans raise this issue again and again and again. As many as 3½ million servicemembers in this country were potentially exposed to toxic smoke. Time is running out for these veterans.

For years, we have worked to highlight this long-ignored issue and the hurdles veterans faced after burn pits and, before that, exposure to Agent Orange. With Agent Orange, we expanded VA benefits. We had to do it condition by condition and location of service by location of service, and it took way, way, way too long. Far too many Vietnam veterans suffering from toxic exposure to Agent Orange died while Congress continued to slow-walk the kinds of benefits we should have done much more quickly. Too many veterans were left behind. Our veterans deserve better.

This bipartisan bill would guarantee that veterans who suffer because of toxic exposure will get the VA benefits they earned for the first time in our country's history. It would finally extend VA healthcare eligibility to all post-9/11 combat veterans. It would expand presumptions for veterans exposed to Agent Orange. It would add 23 burn pit- and toxic exposure-related conditions to VA's list.

The comprehensive legislation is named in honor of Ohio veteran SFC Heath Robinson, who deployed to Kosovo and Iraq with the Ohio National Guard. He passed away in 2020 from cancer as a result of toxic exposure during that military service.

His widow, Danielle Robinson, has been a determined advocate for this cause. She was the First Lady's guest at the State of the Union this year, to underscore the President's commitment to getting this done.

Her mother, Susan Zeier, and Heath's daughter, Brielle, Susan's granddaughter, are here this week, along with so many advocates from Ohio, like Andrea Neutzling, an Army veteran and advocate from Meigs County. Earlier today, Susan and her granddaughter, Brielle, the daughter of Heath Robinson, and Andrea and Tim and others from Ohio were in the Gallery. They are counting on the Senate to finally do the right thing.

This has been a long time coming. It will mean that more than 3 million

toxic-exposed veterans will finally have the expanded access to healthcare which they deserve and which they earned. It is a good first step. It is late for veterans who have suffered for years.

I ask my colleagues to join me in finally keeping our promise to our veterans. We should never forget the debt we owe our veterans, and we are humbled by their commitment to service. It is time that we ensure that our veterans, after sacrificing so much for our country, receive the full benefits and care that they deserve and that they earned.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

BRUCE'S LAW

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I have come to the floor this afternoon to speak about a measure that I will be introducing this week with my colleague from California, Senator FEINSTEIN. We have entitled this bill Bruce's Law in memory of a young Alaskan, Robert “Bruce” Snodgrass, who passed away in Anchorage last October.

Bruce is the son of Sandy Snodgrass. Sandy is with us here today in the Senate Gallery.

Bruce and Sandy lived in California when Bruce was younger before moving back to Alaska. Sandy likes to describe Alaska as Bruce's true home.

Bruce was a good kid. He was a good kid, but, like many good kids, he struggled with alcoholism, he struggled with drug addiction, and he and his family were far too familiar with this, as his grandfather and his father died of the same addictions. And despite all of this, Bruce started using drugs as a teenager, and it really sent his life into a downward spiral. But Sandy was always there. Mom was always there providing a safe and a comfortable home, and yet he was arrested repeatedly and ultimately wound up homeless.

But then, last summer—last summer, things turned around. Bruce made the choice to get clean. He wanted to get his life on track, and Sandy was right there, ready to help, as any good mom would be. She got Bruce to a detox facility and then into a local inpatient program for treatment. He graduated from it, and he moved back home. He was able to spend his time at outpatient meetings. He was in counseling. He liked to ride his mountain bike. He received this after he had completed the treatment program.

But then, one day last October, Bruce went out for a bike ride, and Sandy remembers telling him before he went, she said, “Be careful out there.” But Bruce never came back. He never came home.

On October 20, Bruce's body was found in a grocery store parking lot, and just like that—just like that—suddenly, heart-wrenchingly, and after trying so hard to overcome his demons, he was gone—just gone forever.

And so we grieve with Sandy, who lost her only son that day. No parent—

no parent—should have to bear what she is going through.

But the details of Bruce's death are especially tragic because Bruce died from an accidental overdose of fentanyl. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more powerful than heroin, 100 times stronger than morphine, and it is relatively cheap, easy to make. It makes it attractive for drug dealers, but it is also just incredibly, incredibly dangerous for those who come into contact with it.

Just 2 milligrams, which would fit on the end of a pencil, can cause a fatal overdose. This is how the Justice Department describes it:

Fentanyl powder has the power to kill with the ingestion, inhalation, or skin absorption of just two milligrams. By comparison, a sweetener packet found on a restaurant tabletop generally contains 1,000 milligrams per packet.

So just to give you an idea of how small a deadly amount can be, a single pill, with just trace amounts of fentanyl, can be fatal to the average person, which has prompted the Drug Enforcement Administration to start a campaign that they call a "One Pill Can Kill." This campaign is designed to raise public awareness here.

Now, there is a form of fentanyl that is carefully and precisely manufactured. It is prescribed for medical patients who may be in extreme pain, like those who are suffering from late-stage cancer. And doctors know—they know that they have to be exceedingly judicious with their prescription of this pharmaceutical fentanyl. But it is this other form—the illegal fentanyl—that is being made in underground labs and sold on the streets.

Illegal fentanyl is often laced into counterfeit pills that are made to look like Oxycodone or other frequently used and abused opioids. The fake pills are difficult to distinguish from the real thing without specialized tests because they are deliberately made to look like them.

According to law enforcement authorities, about 40 percent of those pills—of these counterfeit pills—contain a potentially lethal amount of fentanyl.

So you buy a pill, you think it is a frequently abused opioid that you have taken before, but over 40 percent—about 40 percent of these counterfeit pills can contain a potentially lethal amount of fentanyl.

Some drug traffickers are also adding fentanyl into heroin, into meth, into cocaine; and it makes these drugs even more deadly, since fentanyl is indistinguishable in its powder form. If you look at a picture of heroin and fentanyl, you cannot tell the difference. But fentanyl's presence might be the difference between life and death.

It was an official from New Hampshire who said, a couple years ago: You don't know what you are taking. You are injecting yourself with a loaded gun.

Now, most people would avoid fentanyl if they knew what it was capable of doing to them, but oftentimes they don't even know. They don't know. They have never heard of it or they don't know enough about it or, again, they think that they are buying a name-brand prescription pill, not some deadly knock off.

It is now fueling a nationwide crisis with terrible, terrible impacts in every State in the country.

A few weeks ago, the Wall Street Journal reported that drug overdose deaths likely reached more than 107,000 in America last year, an all-time high and an increase of 15 percent from just 2020. Roughly two-thirds of those deaths were attributable to synthetic opioids, led by fentanyl, with an increase of 23 percent year over year. So we are just seeing this skyrocket.

An official with the CDC is quoted in that Wall Street Journal story as saying, "We've never seen anything like this." "We've never seen anything like this." And he is right; we haven't. Nor are we ready to fight it. Fentanyl is flowing into America largely from China and Mexico, and it is coming in at an unprecedented rate—so much so that it recently became the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18 to 45, and this was in the midst of the pandemic, when we were seeing deaths in other areas, but it became the leading cause of death for young Americans.

And no one—no one—has been spared by this growing epidemic. I wish that I could say in Alaska, we are far enough away, we are remote; but, no. I have shared Bruce's story with you, but he is not the only one. Opioid-related deaths in Alaska, mostly from fentanyl, rose by 71 percent between 2020 and 2021. In my State of Alaska, it rose by 71 percent. It now accounts for about 60 percent of the drug overdose deaths in Alaska.

Our law enforcement authorities routinely are intercepting packages with fentanyl. They are finding it in Anchorage, they are finding it in Ketchikan, in other places in the State.

In April, the Alaska High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Initiative—this is what we call the HIDTA initiative—had its largest-ever seizure, worth an estimated \$356,000. Our Governor's office has estimated that the 1,244 grams of fentanyl seized in January, February, March of this year, 2022, could kill 622,000 Alaskans—622,000 Alaskans. That is about 84 percent of our State's population. Think about that. In 3 months—in 3 months—the amount of fentanyl seized could kill 622,000 Alaskans or about 84 percent of our State's population. This is awful. This is a tragedy at every level.

This is also an epidemic of the young, and I am looking to the young people on this floor because I want you to hear how frightening, how deadly, fentanyl is. According to the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services, drug overdose deaths rose by

25 percent among Alaskans aged 15 to 24 last year—so, basically, your age category—and by a staggering 200 percent in young Alaskans between the ages of 25 and 34. It is devastating because behind those numbers are real people, like Sandy's son, like Bruce Snodgrass, who should have celebrated his 23rd birthday just last week. We had beautiful, beautiful weather in Anchorage. I saw Sandy. She reminded me of Bruce's birthday. And you look around and you think about that young man lost, gone—gone.

At least six individuals in the Mat-Su Valley who were killed by fentanyl-laced heroin in March made news in the paper—all just in one story. So, so many others killed, gone—gone.

In the wake of Bruce's death, Sandy has said that she was in shock for several months, which is entirely understandable. But since then—since then—she has decided to tell her story, share her heartache, in hopes that other moms won't lose their sons, and so she is an advocate. She is an advocate with every ounce of her being, and it is thanks to her that we are introducing Bruce's law.

Bruce's Law starts with education and awareness, requiring the Federal Government to create a nationwide campaign against fentanyl for school-aged children, young adults, parents, first responders, and care providers. The campaign will help illustrate the extreme dangers of pills and street drugs that could be laced with fentanyl; help prevent drug abuse, including through the safe disposal of prescription medications; and help identify the early-warning signs of addiction.

Bruce's Law also authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human Services to form an interagency working group on fentanyl contamination of illegal drugs. This group would consist of Federal Agencies, State-level HIDTA directors, parents who have lost loved ones to fentanyl overdose deaths, and those with lived experience and recovery. It would consult with experts at all levels to identify strategies, resources, and supports to address the incidence of drug overdoses with fentanyl-contaminated drugs. It will review current Federal strategies to seek improvements to them, particularly when it comes to educating middle and high school students about the profound danger of these drugs.

The final part of Bruce's Law authorizes new community-based coalition enhancement grants to help educate young people about the risks of street drugs laced with fentanyl. This would allow the Drug-Free Communities Coalitions to access new funding focused specifically on fentanyl and to try to curb or eradicate its use.

This is a starting point. It is a starting point. And we have to start because we have such a serious problem on our hands. We know we have it in Anchorage, where Bruce Snodgrass likely never knew that he was taking a drug

laced with fentanyl; where the officer who met Sandy after Bruce's body was found had just come—he had just come from notifying another family of another death caused by another overdose.

We also know that we are not alone. This is a national crisis. We know we must do more—more to prevent fentanyl from coming across our borders; more to prevent fentanyl-laced drugs from being sold on the street; more to educate Americans, especially—especially—young adults, especially youth, about its acute danger; and more to address addiction and to provide support for recovery.

As I close, I want to thank Senator FEINSTEIN for being the lead Democratic sponsor of Bruce's Law, as well as Senator SULLIVAN and Senator HASSAN for agreeing to cosponsor it with us. I would encourage every Member of the Senate to sign on to this legislation.

We acknowledge in Alaska this is a problem in our State, and we have to acknowledge it in all of our 50 States. I urge others to join us in this effort. Send us your input on how we might be able to strengthen this legislation.

Again, I want to thank Sandy. I want to thank Sandy Snodgrass, who is with us today. Joining her are Kim Kovol from the Office of the Governor, as well as Mike Troster, who is the State of Alaska's HIDTA director. Each of them—each of them—they are such important advocates.

We recognize that it is going to take all of us doing a lot more than we are doing now to raise awareness of fentanyl and turn back this deadly tide, but we have to. We have to for our communities, for our kids, and for Bruce.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

H.R. 3967

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I rise to discuss helping our servicemembers exposed to toxic burn pits.

Let me tell you about U.S. Army SFC Heath Robinson. He was a strong, healthy, fit combat medic who served tours in Kosovo and Iraq. When he returned home, however, he began experiencing fatigue. He started bleeding from his ears and nose and completely lost his voice.

After consulting multiple doctors, he and his wife were sitting in the exam room waiting for test results when the doctor came in with tears in his eyes. He explained that Sergeant Robinson had an extremely rare form of stage IV lung cancer and exclaimed: What have you been exposed to? Sergeant Robinson thought back to his tour in Iraq. He remembered seeing and smelling smoke from pits the size of football fields at his base near Baghdad.

While serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond, millions of U.S. troops have lived and worked near burn pits. They are basically burning trash heaps that the military has used for decades

to dispose of everything from human waste to trash and electronics and jet fuel, and they spew forth many of the same dangerous toxins that were at Ground Zero after 9/11.

The VA estimates that 3.5 million servicemembers were exposed to burn pits around the world, many of them veterans who are now suffering from permanent injuries and illnesses ranging from chronic bronchitis to cancer. But when these veterans seek treatments, they face an often unsurmountable burden of proof.

For SFC Heath Robinson, the VA denied him compensation and prescription medications because it wasn't proven that burn pits were the cause of his illness. Army Sergeant Robinson died in 2020. He was only 39 years old.

I have heard from many veterans, servicemembers, and their families who have also been raising the alarm about burn pits. Gina Cancelino of New York told me about her husband Joseph, who was a Marine Corps veteran, an NYPD sergeant, and a dad of two girls. In 2017, he developed a very rare, very aggressive form of testicular cancer, as well as thyroid cancer. He died in 2019 when he was just 52.

This is simply unacceptable. Our servicemembers risk their lives to keep us safe. All they ask for is care in return, but our government has failed them repeatedly. First, it was Agent Orange. Then, it was the Blue Water Navy vets. Today, it is burn pits.

That is why, nearly 2 years ago, I started working with Jon Stewart, John Feal, and a strong coalition of veterans service organizations to craft the Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act.

This bill forms the centerpiece of the Honoring Our PACT Act, which has now been named in honor of Sergeant Robinson. The bottom line: It would remove the unsurmountable and unreasonable burden of proof for veterans to receive care. No longer would these selfless individuals have to jump through hoops to get the care they actually have already earned. No longer would they have to spend hours upon hours researching the very diseases that are killing them. No longer would they have to spend their own money on biopsies to prove their illnesses are exposure-related and service-related. No longer would they be forced to suffer or even die like Sergeant Robinson, Sergeant Cancelino, and so many others as our Nation and government continue to fail them.

Now we have the opportunity to pass this bill here in this Chamber at this moment in time. While we have incredible momentum, we still have to make sure we get 60 votes on final passage. I have been meeting with many of you to drum up the support we need for this critical bill to get it over the finish line. Its passage will represent an enormous victory for servicemembers and veterans across the country.

I am proud of the enormous progress we have made in this effort, and I hope

that all of my colleagues will join us in passing the PACT Act, not only for Sergeants Robinson and Cancelino but for all of the brave men and women who are still suffering and dying from their exposure to burn pits while serving this country so honorably.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I want to thank my colleagues who have worked with us on a bipartisan basis to bring the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 to the floor for a vote. That is a mouthful. The PACT Act is the way it is known more colloquially.

The PACT Act is a profoundly significant measure. It is a milestone in our dealing with the health and benefits that our veterans deserve.

We know that the modern battlefield is filled with toxins and poison that could cause grave injury, and many of the afflictions that result from those toxins or chemicals are manifested only years after a veteran leaves Active-Duty service. In fact, cancer, hypertension, skin disease—the list is long, and so are the number of years when the illnesses can arrive. They are latent. They are hidden. Like many wounds of war, they are invisible at the time. But these brave men and women who serve us on the modern battlefield experience them at higher rates because there are more of those toxins and chemicals.

We have seen them, for example, in the burn pit. One of my sons, a Marine Corps officer in Afghanistan, saw them firsthand, described them to me, and worried about the effects on him. So far he is fine, but the years ahead are an unknown for him and for countless other men and women who may have been exposed. In fact, they may not even know that they have been exposed to these chemicals and toxins.

The fact of the matter is that the Veterans Administration has resisted taking responsibility for these illnesses. It has erected thresholds of proof and barriers of evidence for veterans who suffer the effects of the burn pit and the other sources of toxic chemicals that can inflict such grievous pain and worry on so many of them. That is why this legislation is so significant—because it will begin to right the inaction of the government in helping veterans afflicted by toxic exposure.

We have been here before. We have fought year after year after year for veterans who were afflicted with the results of Agent Orange over the resistance and the opposition of the VA. And even after we passed the measure, righting those wrongs, the VA resisted implementing the law, not under this administration, fortunately, but previous ones.

I am immensely grateful to this VA for its seeming support of this measure, but I am most grateful to the veterans themselves, the veterans service

organizations that have been at our side and have had our back, including the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, their organization. The IAVA has played an important role; likewise, the VFW—Veterans of Foreign Wars—the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and others. They are among the main rulers who deserve predominant thanks.

Chairman TESTER and Ranking Member MORAN and our counterparts in the House Committee on Veterans Affairs have been instrumental in this measure. In fact, I worked with Senator MORAN on this issue when I was the ranking member on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. He saw, along with me, the importance of moving forward on this issue.

This inaction has affected countless families like Sergeant First Class Robinson's family. I received a handwritten note from his young daughter yesterday urging me to vote yes on "my dad's bill." Let there be no mistake, I am going to be voting yes on this bill, and I hope that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will overwhelmingly join me in voting yes.

I want to say, in particular, how proud I have been to lead legislation, along with colleagues like Senator TILLIS, to advance particular causes of groups of veterans who have been specifically affected. For example, the Palomares nuclear accident in 1966 caused huge suffering and pain to men and women in uniform who were sent to clean up a crash or a release of bombs. They didn't explode, but they were nuclear weapons, and they had to be cleaned up. Their remediation exposed those veterans to radiation, and the PACT Act will provide them with much needed relief.

Similarly, there are an estimated 16,000—that is right; 16,000—U.S. servicemembers deployed to a base in Uzbekistan known as K2. It was an old Soviet base, which became a dumping ground for all kinds of toxic substances, and they were exposed to those substances when they served there.

Now, the old Soviet Union didn't care much about its people—Russia not much more—about its people in uniform, but we should, and we do. That is why the PACT Act would provide care to them.

In the United States at Camp Lejeune, many of our veterans and their families were exposed to toxins in the water supply. They have been left without any real recourse. My friend and colleague Senator TILLIS and I worked together on legislation to help these thousands of veterans and their families impacted by those toxins at Camp Lejeune. It was an uphill battle. We had to overcome a lot of resistance. Again, some of our VA friends didn't see it our way, but my feeling is that we had to fight as tenaciously for those Camp Lejeune families as marines do for us.

The PACT Act essentially regards these kinds of illnesses and afflictions

as part of the cost of war, and it puts the presumption of service-connected cause on the side of the veteran because many of them are making claims after the fact, indeed, well after they have left the battlefield. The proof is much more difficult for them to make and much easier for the VA to resist, so the burden should be on the VA to prove that these illnesses are not service connected, not the other way around. The presumption has to be in favor of the veteran. That is the basic fairness here. It levels the playing field so that veterans have a fair chance at making sure that they receive the healthcare and the benefits that they deserve and need.

I am proud that this measure is bipartisan. It is long overdue, but it moves us in the right direction, and maybe it helps to prove that we can continue to work productively together. Certainly, as to veterans, we need to do the right thing in recognizing these costs of war.

This measure is not only an important milestone as legislation, but it also represents an opportunity to educate our country about invisible wounds, about brave men and women who serve in combat and come home without necessarily a visible wound but experience a different kind of hardship and burden. Their sacrifice must be recognized. They need healthcare, and they deserve it. The benefits that they are receiving as a result of this measure are extraordinarily and deeply well deserved and should be available promptly.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I have been on the floor quite a few times about an industry which is controversial: for-profit schools. If you want to know about for-profit colleges and universities, you have to remember two numbers, and the numbers are these: 8 and 33. Eight percent of the graduates of high schools go to for-profit colleges and universities; 33 percent of all the student loan defaults are students who started out at for-profit colleges and universities.

They are students who didn't finish or ended up with a worthless degree, couldn't make enough money, and defaulted on their student loans. That is an industry that deserves close scrutiny, because, you see, they operate almost exclusively with Federal taxpayers' dollars.

I believe that they have really posed an unscrupulous threat to unsuspecting students, to taxpayers, and to the solvency of Federal student aid programs.

Corinthian Colleges, sounds great, doesn't it? That was one of them, one of the largest for-profit college companies, and one of the worst.

It operated more than a hundred campuses, including six in my home State of Illinois, under names like Everest Colleges, WyoTech, and Heald Colleges.

At its peak, Corinthian enrolled more than 110,000 students, raking in a \$1.4 billion sum from the Federal Treasury every year, 1.4 billion for Corinthian. How did Corinthian attract its students? It lied. It invested heavily in marketing and advertising. It created a business model that relied heavily on predatory sales practices. It deliberately misled students into taking on more debt than they could ever, ever repay.

They lied to potential students about the school's job placement rates. They lied about the students' future salary prospects. They lied about whether Corinthian credits could be transferred to another college. Most appallingly, Corinthian recruiters were sent out to look for the most vulnerable targets: high school students whose families had no experience with higher education—minority students.

An internal company document described Corinthian's target demographic as "isolated people" with "low self-esteem." People who have "few people in their lives who care about them" and people who are "stuck, unable to see and plan for the future." They preyed on these people.

Single moms living close to poverty were the best targets. In 2013, Vice President KAMALA HARRIS, who was then California's attorney general, sued this company for predatory and deceptive business practices. That lawsuit was followed by investigations by four different Federal agencies and more than 20 State attorneys general for consumer fraud on all of their campuses.

Corinthian's enrollment numbers and stock prices tumbled with these investigations, and on April 26, 2015, the whole Corinthian College house of cards collapsed. The company announced abruptly it would close all of its schools the following day.

The announcement left 16,000 students stunned and worried about how they were ever going to pay off the debts they had incurred and about the degrees that they wouldn't be able to finish.

Back in 2015, I called for widespread relief for borrowers defrauded by Corinthian. And last week, these borrowers finally received some long overdue relief. Seven years after they closed Corinthian, they finally got relief from the student loans they incurred because of the fraud of Corinthian Colleges.

In its largest student loan forgiveness action ever, the Education Department recognized the rot that was at the core of Corinthian Colleges and announced it was going to wipe out \$5.8

billion in student loan debt owed by 560,000 borrowers who attended the company's for-profit schools.

You see, the Federal Government was saying to the students: These schools are OK. You can borrow Federal money going to these schools.

These students said, well, I couldn't get a Federal loan unless it was a real college or university, and, in fact, they were wrong.

For former Corinthian students, this loan forgiveness means finally their credit scores will start to get above sinking, fewer garnished paychecks, and calls from collection agencies may just slow down. I applaud Education Secretary Cardona and President Biden for their leadership on this simple issue of justice.

This is the latest step the Biden administration has taken to ease the crush of student loan debt.

The administration has used relief programs aimed at a variety of borrowers, including public service workers and people with disabilities. It also paused loan repayment during the pandemic.

President Biden reportedly is considering a broader student loan forgiveness program that would benefit more borrowers, such a program—if it is responsibly crafted—would be a boon not only to individual borrowers and their families, but also to our economy. It would make it possible for young people to finally restart their lives, buy a car, maybe even a home, start a business, maybe even a family—the kinds of investments that make America grow the right way.

I also believe we need to rethink the provisions in our Federal bankruptcy laws that make student loan debt one of the few debts that cannot be discharged in bankruptcy proceedings. If you declare bankruptcy, you can basically be discharged from any obligation to pay back your mortgage, even your mortgage on a second home, your car loan, or even money that you borrowed for a boat. You can discharge all those in bankruptcies, but you cannot discharge your student loan, in all practical purposes.

Bankruptcy should be allowed to be used as a last resort for borrowers who have no other place to turn. I expect to have more to say about that in the near future.

America needs more trained nurses, doctors, teachers, engineers, mechanics, and skilled professionals and trade workers than ever before. It is in America's national and economic interest to make sure that student loans are a prudent investment and to protect unsuspecting students from unscrupulous organizations like these for-profit colleges and universities.

We should have learned our lesson as a Nation.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up

to 15 minutes and Senator STABENOW for 1 minute prior to the scheduled rollcall votes.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### UKRAINE

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, last Friday was a grim milestone. It was the 100th day of the war in Ukraine—a war being waged by Russia against an ally in a democratic country, Ukraine: a hundred days of brutal, unrelenting rocket and missile attacks throughout Ukraine, including attacks on a number of civilian targets like hospitals and churches and apartment buildings, schools. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens and soldiers have been killed and entire cities have been laid to rubble by the Russian barrages.

For the 14th straight week when the Senate has been in session during this war, I come to the Senate floor again today to discuss the status of this unprovoked and bloody invasion and to talk about what our role as Americans ought to be.

First, it can never be emphasized enough that the people of Ukraine, professional soldiers and civilians and volunteers alike, have demonstrated courage, fortitude, and competence in beating all expectations in their existential battle against the odds to preserve their freedom and protect their homeland.

I am not surprised because I have seen the spirit and bravery of the Ukrainian people firsthand. In my seven or eight or nine trips to Ukraine, including meetings with Ukrainian troops on the line of contact before this latest invasion, I have seen the Ukrainian spirit. To have held off Russia this long demonstrates their strength and their resiliency. But at this moment in time there is reason for concern too.

President Zelenskyy just said that Russia now controls 20 percent of Ukraine's territory. Before the war started, Russia controlled just 7 percent of Ukraine, after its illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the creation of a Russian-backed separatist government in parts of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine.

If you look at this map, you can see here what Russia took in 2014, Crimea and part of the Donbas here, and look what they have now and look at where the battles are occurring.

I made another trip to the region last week, and what I heard was that thanks to the fierce Ukrainian resistance, Ukrainians have had success in some parts of the country.

Remember, at one point Kyiv was under attack and there were Russian troops coming down from Belarus. They have been repelled, so there have been successes. There is no question about it. But Russia has now consolidated its troops and its firepower in this area, in the south and in the east, and they are making gains—incremental gains, but gains nonetheless.

This is a crucial point in the war, and we have to redouble our efforts and do

that now to help Ukrainians defend themselves, to save Ukrainian lives, and to push the Russian invasion back.

In my trip to the region last week, I also visited with U.S. troops and commanders in Germany and with heads of government, military leaders, and refugee coordinators in Romania and Moldova before traveling to the United Kingdom, one of our staunchest allies. I thank them for their support.

While I was in Moldova, I was able to cross the border into Ukraine, where I met Ukrainian refugees leaving the country, but also Ukrainians who were actually returning to Ukraine, as the place where they lived in this part of Ukraine, closer to Kyiv, was relatively stable.

During my visits with the leaders of Moldova and Romania, I was able to thank each of them for their support in Ukraine and to learn more about what they need to be more effective partners in the region.

In Germany, visiting with the U.S.-European command, I received detailed briefings on the state of the war in Ukraine, as well as what the United States and our allies are doing to support Ukraine's brave defenders with military assistance.

I also met with the senior Ukrainian liaison there from the Ukrainian military who gave me his very frank assessment of the war and what weapons his brothers-in-arms absolutely need to be able to continue their fight. As I mentioned earlier, Russia's recent gains on the eastern side of the country are cause for serious concern.

Russia's mainline effort, again, is here in the Donbas region. By all accounts, the Ukrainians are making the Russians pay dearly for every inch of territory, but they are taking territory, incrementally, and the Ukrainians, both soldiers and civilians, are taking higher casualties.

The primary reason is the Russian artillery has a longer range than the artillery that the Ukrainians possess. They are able to strike Ukrainian positions from safe distances where Ukrainian artillery cannot reach them. This unlevel playing field in eastern Ukraine must be addressed.

This is why I have been urging the administration and our allies to immediately provide Ukraine with the weapons they are asking for to allow them to have a fighting chance against the longer range Russian artillery, specifically longer range advanced rocket artillery systems. These systems which we have are superior or at least on par with the Russian artillery in terms of distance, accuracy, reload speed, and mobility and would help immediately to level the playing field for Ukraine.

I spoke about the need for these weapons in my floor speech on May 24. I have tweeted about it, I think, six or seven times. Finally, after weeks of urging that we listen to the Ukrainians and provide these systems, I was very pleased that the administration announced last Tuesday that they will



provide Ukraine with high-mobility artillery rocket systems or HIMARS. But I am concerned not just by how long it took and continues to take but by how long it will take to get these systems in place in Ukraine while lives are being lost and Ukrainian territory is being taken.

Moreover, the best information that I have is that the administration is only providing four of these HIMARS systems, which will have limited impact on the battlefield. I hope I am wrong about that. I hope there are more on the way. But that is the best information we have.

They are also only providing Ukraine with midrange missiles, meaning that Ukrainian troops will need to fire closer to Russian positions and put themselves at greater risk. That may be OK because that may be comparable or maybe even slightly better than the Russian artillery, but they are not getting the special, longer range missiles.

Lastly, we are being told it will take time to train Ukrainian soldiers on how to operate this advanced system. All told, it will take, we are told, roughly 2 weeks for these systems to arrive in-theater and for Ukrainian troops to be sufficiently trained on them. In the meantime, Russia's brutal advance will proceed, and Ukrainian lives will continue to be lost.

There is some good news on that front from another part of our allied front. Just yesterday, the British announced that they will send several multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine, which is a larger version of what we are sending. This is very important. I appreciate what the UK is doing, and I also urge other allied countries that have this longer range capacity to step up as well.

In addition, this week we learned that Spain is ready to send Leopard battle tanks and anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine. This is a big change, and we appreciate the fact that the Spanish military support has been increasing. They will also provide training for Ukrainian Army officials and soldiers on the tanks, according to the report, which cites government sources.

Also, in, Severodonetsk, the city the Russians were overrunning last weekend, reports indicate that the Ukrainians have counterattacked and are putting up a fierce resistance to Russia's assault.

This is this area right here.

Although the battle is far from over, the Ukrainians are, once again, demonstrating their incredible bravery and resolve, showing the world that despite being outgunned, they will not give up without a fight.

After my briefings in Germany, I traveled to Romania, where I met with Prime Minister Ciuca, the Minister of Economy, State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, members of Parliament, and officials and volunteers involved with welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

America could ask for no better friend than Romania. Our interests

align on many issues, including energy security, defense spending, food security, standing against Russian aggression, and blocking malign Chinese investments in critical infrastructure. Our relationship is strengthened by the Romanian community in the United States, including in Ohio, where thousands trace their heritage back to that great country.

Twenty percent of Romania's energy comes from nuclear energy, and the country plans to boost that to 40 percent in coming years, with America as their partner of choice. I urge the Biden administration to do more to support Romania's embrace of nuclear energy, especially with regard to the Export-Import Bank, working with American energy companies. As their production increases, I hope that Romania can become an energy hub that can help wean its neighbors off Russian energy. Romania has been smart. They have cut their ties with both Chinese nuclear energy and telecommunications companies, fully recognizing the threat that these companies pose. And unlike other countries in Europe, they are not dependent on Russian energy.

Romania has also been creative in finding ways to help Ukraine export its grain. This is a huge issue. We all know that Ukraine is a large exporter, whether it is sunflower oil or whether it is corn or whether it is wheat, but particularly with regard to wheat. So many poor countries around the world depend on Ukrainian wheat.

This photograph, unfortunately, is of a bombing attack only about a day and a half ago in the area of the Port of Odessa. And this is the Russians exploding a bomb at a grain bin. So they are destroying wheat and other grains that would be destined for poor countries in the world. This is what is going on today in Ukraine.

There is something else that is very important, and that is the ability of Ukraine to export this wheat that they do have in bins around the country. I discussed this at length with Prime Minister Ciuca of Romania. It is extremely important because he has the ability to help with regard to a port in Romania to get some of this grain out that would normally go out through Odessa, which has been mined and has been—mined by the Russians.

So here we are. The Port of Constanta is here. This is Romania. This is Ukraine. Here is the Port of Odessa. Over here is the Donbas, where we were earlier.

This port is actually the largest port on the Black Sea. It is difficult to get from Odessa to here, but in talking to the Prime Minister, he has some great ideas on how to deal with this. With the blockade of Odessa by Russia, there is an opportunity to use rail, to use a canal system, and to use roads to get the grain to Constanta to be able to export it.

I appreciate the fact the Romanians are willing to work us on that, and it is

incredibly important, again, not just to Ukraine and their economy to have the ability to export, but it is also incredibly important because the dire warnings of global food insecurity and price spikes if this blockade continues concerns all of us. It certainly concerns this Congress and this administration.

These poor countries in Africa depend on Ukrainian wheat to avoid food shortages.

Romanian officials told me they intend to work with Ukraine in this project, and I appreciate that.

Malign actors around the world, by the way, have used food as a weapon over time. The Houthis in Yemen, Assad in Syria, and now Putin in Russia.

President Putin recently suggested that he would only lift his stranglehold on these ports, including Odessa, if the sanctions were lifted on Russia.

Let me be clear. Food should never be used as leverage in negotiations. Russia must lift its blockade immediately without any conditions. Millions of lives depend on it. I would expect the administration and allies, including Turkey, to be coming up with contingency plans now, if they don't have them already, to ensure that this wheat can be exported and other grains as well.

When it comes to the administration, President Biden has said recently: "There is going to have to be a negotiated settlement" to end this war.

I urge the administration not to talk about ceding ground in Ukraine. This does not signal resolve or clarity; it signals weakness. It will not help us break the blockade in the Black Sea, and it will not help Ukraine win this war. We should be doing what we can with allies—short of boots on the ground—helping the Ukrainians take back every inch of territory that Russia has taken from them since 2014.

That is fair, just, and what Ukrainian officials themselves have been calling for. Our allies in Eastern Europe know what is at stake here. Romania is a great example. A staunch NATO ally, Romania is committed to the military defense of the alliance and meets NATO's goal of spending 2 percent of its GDP on defense. They actually told me when I was there that they plan to raise it to 2.5 percent in the next few years in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After Romania, I visited Moldova, where I met with Prime Minister Gavrilita, the Minister of Internal Affairs, and various parliamentarians. I was impressed with what I saw. As I told the Prime Minister, Moldova is a small country that punches way above its weight. Moldova has graciously accepted almost half a million Ukrainian refugees through its border—more per capita than any other Nation.

Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine is far from over, and if Russia continues to gain ground or opens up an assault on Odessa, which many fear, it will send another massive wave of refugees westward into Moldova.

While in Moldova, I traveled to Palanca, a border crossing that is run jointly by Moldovan, Ukrainian, and EU Frontex border security guards. While at the border, I had the opportunity to speak with Ukrainians whose lives have been turned upside down by this war. Some were leaving Moldova, some were coming back into Moldova, but they all expressed to me their fears that Russia will gain ground and expand their brutal assault to other parts of the country, including Odessa, which is only about 30 miles away from where I was.

Now, as the war rages on and we cross 100 days of this brutal invasion, I want to highlight another recent development. I have mentioned on this floor many times the need for stronger sanctions against Russia, particularly with regard to energy but also trade and banking. In particular, I have pointed out that Europe sends Russia roughly \$870 million a day in gas and oil receipts that help fund the Putin war machine.

So I was pleased that late last week the European Union took a positive step in partially banning Russian oil into the EU. Specifically, these phased-in sanctions will prohibit the import of seaborne crude oil from Russia and petroleum products over the next 8 months. This phased-in embargo, I believe, along with countries like Germany that stopped pipeline oil altogether, is expected to impact approximately 90 percent of Russian oil imports into Europe by the end of this year. Combined with the ban on coal imports that Russia has agreed to earlier this year, which will take effect in August, Europe is undoubtedly making progress in cutting off that nearly \$1 billion that goes to Russia to feed the war machine.

Even better, given the situation on the ground in Ukraine today, would be a full embargo against all Russian energy immediately, as the United States has done, but this is progress.

Given their greater dependence on Russian oil and gas, by the way, Europe's energy independence from Russia will require a different kind of leadership from the United States as we establish a new energy world order.

Where the United States can help most is to get more energy on the global market now to help backfill Russia's energy needs and stabilize prices. Instead of looking to countries like Iran and Venezuela to produce more energy, this administration should be pursuing policies to expand our domestic oil and gas production as well as renewables, nuclear, all of the above. And in the longer term for our national security and that of our allies, the United States needs to take steps to lead the world in developing and exporting the next-generation energy technologies like advanced nuclear and hydrogen.

The reality is this: It shouldn't have taken a global energy crisis for us to realize this. Before this administration took office, concerns had been raised

about the prospect about aggressive or idealistic policies that threaten the reliability and security of our energy supplies here in the United States. We need to act, and we need to act now. Providing LNG to Europe is key to Europe being able to wean themselves from Russian gas.

The fact is, we need to unleash American energy. We have the resources here to help our friends and allies. We can help everyone so that they don't need to take another dime and give it to Vladimir Putin's war machine.

Right now, Ukrainians continue to suffer, and the world must not turn a blind eye. According to the United Nations recently, nearly 7 million Ukrainian refugees have fled the country since the war began, and another 8 million Ukrainians are internally displaced. This invasion has flattened beautiful cities in Ukraine, like Mariupol, where, according to local officials, at least 22,000 residents have been killed.

I will close with this. I have now come to this floor every week since just before President Putin put this illegal and unprovoked invasion upon the people of a democratic Ukraine, who just wanted to live in peace with their neighbors—their neighbors, by the way, including Russia.

Some have asked me why a Senator from Ohio should care about this fighting in Ukraine, and I tell them every American should care. This is a fight during our generation where democracy is on the line. Some folks here may not agree with that; I understand. But Ukrainians get it. They know what it is like to live under the thumb of an authoritarian, of Russia, and they broke away from that and toward democracy in 1991 and again, as we all saw, in 2014. I was in Ukraine then in 2014 right after the Revolution of Dignity, where Ukrainians decided for themselves that they wanted to turn to us and to Europe to pursue a hopeful future of freedom and democracy. Now President Putin is trying to extinguish that hope. We must not let him.

I am also motivated by the tens of thousands of Ukrainian-American friends and constituents in my home State of Ohio, some of whom joined me for an update last Friday, where I learned more about the amazing Ohio volunteer efforts to help Ukraine.

But even if I didn't have one constituent of Ukrainian descent or know a single Ukrainian, I would be on this floor condemning Russia's atrocities.

As Russian forces target Ukrainian civilians, people from across the globe are showing their support and encouragement for Ukrainians. In Ohio, we have assured Ukrainians that America has their back.

At the Ohio State University, President Kristina Johnson participated in a call with President Zelenskyy, and she said she asked him how Ohio State could help. President Zelenskyy answered with: How about helping to rebuild our cities that have been flat-

tened? What did President Johnson say? "Count on us." That has been the consistent theme from the Buckeye State—count on us. In fact, student organizations like the Ukrainian Society and Desserts for Donations have held fundraisers around the State selling buttons, pins, desserts—all of which have been donated to the Revived Ukrainian Soldiers, a group that provides medical and humanitarian aid.

I have listed before on this floor a dozen other great causes in Ohio that have been helpful with regard to the humanitarian effort in Ukraine. Ohioans get it. They know that America can't afford to stay on the sidelines and be a spectator.

I commend the administration for the actions taken, but as I have said before, we need to do more and more quickly. At this crucial time in the battle, freedom and democracy are at stake and the ability for countries to have their territorial integrity respected. America cannot afford to be tentative. Instead, we must lead with allies in protecting the post-World War II order. We are being watched by those allies, 41 of whom have joined us in helping Ukraine defend itself. But we are also being watched by our adversaries who must see strength and determination and willingness to lead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first I want to thank my friend from Ohio for his passionate leadership on this very, very important issue and the importance of standing with Ukraine. I want to thank him for that.

NOMINATION OF CHAVONDA J. JACOBS-YOUNG

Mr. President, we are about to vote on a very important position in the Department of Agriculture, and I am urging my colleagues to confirm Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young as our next Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics at the Department of Agriculture.

It is critical to quickly confirm Dr. Jacobs-Young because without Agency leadership and senior staff, the research Agencies at USDA can't do the really essential work that our producers are counting on.

Dr. Jacobs-Young is extremely qualified. She has held leadership roles at multiple research Agencies at the USDA and the White House. She will be the first woman of color to serve in the USDA's highest scientific post.

She was the first African-American woman in the country to receive a Ph.D. in wood and paper science and the first woman of color to serve as the Administrator for the Agriculture Research Service.

She has even got her own statue on the National Mall as part of the IfThenSheCan exhibit to celebrate contemporary women innovators in science, technology, engineering, and math—her own statue on the Mall.

Her commitment to science, research, and education is a true inspiration.



I am excited about the nomination of Dr. Jacobs-Young, and I know that she will help protect scientific integrity at the USDA and build a diverse and resilient scientific workforce. I appreciate the cooperation of my colleague and friend, our Ranking Member Senator BOOZMAN, in moving this nomination forward, and I urge my colleagues to vote to confirm Dr. Jacobs-Young today.

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume executive session.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Chavonda J. Jacobs-Young, of Georgia, to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education, and Economics.

#### VOTE ON JACOBS-YOUNG NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Jacobs-Young nomination?

Ms. STABENOW. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 95, nays 4, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 216 Ex.]

#### YEAS—95

Baldwin	Graham	Portman
Barrasso	Grassley	Reed
Bennet	Hagerty	Risch
Blackburn	Hassan	Romney
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Rosen
Blunt	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Booker	Hirono	Rubio
Boozman	Hoeven	Sanders
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Brown	Inhofe	Schatz
Burr	Johnson	Schumer
Cantwell	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Capito	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cardin	Kennedy	Shaheen
Carper	King	Shelby
Casey	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cassidy	Lankford	Smith
Collins	Leahy	Stabenow
Coons	Lee	Tester
Cornyn	Lujan	Thune
Cortez Masto	Lummis	Tillis
Cotton	Manchin	Toomey
Cramer	Markey	Tuberville
Crapo	Marshall	Van Hollen
Cruz	McConnell	Warner
Daines	Menendez	Warnock
Duckworth	Moran	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murray	Wicker
Feinstein	Ossoff	Young
Fischer	Padilla	
Gillibrand	Peters	

#### NAYS—4

Hawley	Paul	Sullivan
Murkowski		

#### NOT VOTING—1

Merkley

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Kenneth L. Wainstein, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security.

#### VOTE ON WAINSTEIN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Wainstein nomination?

Ms. DUCKWORTH. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER).

The result was announced—yeas 63, nays 35, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 217 Ex.]

#### YEAS—63

Baldwin	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Romney
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Blunt	Hirono	Rounds
Booker	Kaine	Sanders
Brown	Kelly	Sasse
Burr	King	Schatz
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Schumer
Capito	Leahy	Shaheen
Cardin	Lujan	Sinema
Carper	Manchin	Smith
Casey	Markey	Stabenow
Collins	McConnell	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Tillis
Cornyn	Murkowski	Toomey
Cortez Masto	Murphy	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Murray	Warner
Durbin	Ossoff	Warnock
Feinstein	Padilla	Warren
Gillibrand	Peters	Whitehouse
Graham	Portman	Wyden

#### NAYS—35

Barrasso	Hagerty	Paul
Blackburn	Hawley	Risch
Boozman	Hoeven	Rubio
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Cassidy	Inhofe	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Johnson	Shelby
Crapo	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cruz	Lankford	Thune
Daines	Lee	Tuberville
Ernst	Lummis	Wicker
Fischer	Marshall	Young
Grassley	Moran	

#### NOT VOTING—2

Merkley

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the Presi-

dent will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

#### NOMINATION OF SHALANDA H. BAKER

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I am pleased to support the nomination of Ms. Shalanda Baker to be the Director of the Office of Minority Economic Impact at the Department of Energy.

Congress established the Office of Minority Economic Impact within the Department of Energy in 1978. Congress recognized that the energy shortages and rising energy prices we faced at the time would have an overwhelming impact on the quality of life for our socially or economically disadvantaged citizens.

The Office of Minority Economic Impact was created to provide a mechanism to ensure that the energy needs of minorities were fairly considered and addressed. Its goals were, first, to understand the impacts of our energy policies and programs on the quality of life in minority communities and, second, to ensure that minority business enterprises are afforded an equal opportunity to participate fully in the energy programs of the Department.

The position of Director was created not only to head this office, but also to advise the Secretary of Energy on the effect of the energy policies, regulations, and actions of the Department on minorities and on how to increase minority participation in the Department's programs. The position does not carry with it the policy making or regulatory or adjudicatory powers of many other senior offices in the Department of Energy, but it plays an important role in ensuring that the needs of minority and disadvantaged communities are justly and fairly addressed and that they are treated fairly.

The Director also helps ensure that the Department complies with our civil rights and equal employment laws and that it maintains a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment.

The Department of Energy's commitment to fairness, equality, and diversity has always been important. But it is especially important today, as we face record high fuel prices, come to grips with the global climate crisis, and transform how we fuel our economy. We must ensure that our energy policies do not leave anyone behind or impose an unfair or disproportionate burden on minority or disadvantaged communities.

I believe Ms. Baker is very well qualified for this position. She has spent the past decade studying the impact of the transition from fossil fuels to cleaner energy resources on disadvantaged communities. And she has spent the past 17 months serving as the Deputy Director for Energy Justice and as Secretary Granholm's Advisor on Equity.

I strongly support her nomination, and I urge a favorable vote on her nomination.